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ABSTRACT

The paper's first section discusses the connection between personalized reading and punctuation for young primary grade students, with some specific sentences and teaching ideas. Next, the paper describes 10 kinds of written work, done for specific purposes, that may be used with early primary students to emphasize this personalized connection. It outlines 7 basics of punctuation which students need to learn to use, to attain clarity in writing. Finally, the paper discusses 10 criteria from the psychology of learning which should be used in teaching punctuation to students. (SR)

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Punctuation in the Reading/Writing Curriculum.

by Marlow Ediger

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PUNCTUATION IN THE READING/WRITING CURRICULUM

Proper punctuation is vital in the reading/writing curriculum. It clarifies what has been written and makes written content more meaningful. There are a plethora of ways to interpret written subject matter unless the content is properly punctuated. If commas, for example, are omitted, it would be difficult or impossible to determine how many people attended an event such as, "John Mark Ruth Elaine and Bob attended the play." There could be as many as five in attendance or as few as three. Once the commas are put in proper place, the sentence is clarified as intended such as, "John Mark, Ruth Elaine, and Bob attended the play." In oral communication, there are brief pauses between words to indicate commas for the above named sentence. In written communication, there are diverse punctuation marks to indicate, among other things, pauses within a sentence. When should punctuation signs first be taught in the public schools? The answer is it depends upon the child's readiness for learning these abstract symbols. Certainly, by grade one, many students may benefit from meaningful instruction.

Personalized Reading and Punctuation

Young primary grade students seemingly enjoy personalized reading. First, these students need to experience items and objects so that they have something to talk and write about. Background information is needed. The teacher may place selected objects on a learning center. After viewing and discussing these interesting objects, students may present ideas pertaining thereto for the teacher to record on the chalkboard or in a word processor. Students may then see their ideas recorded or talk written down. As each idea is given within a small group setting, the teacher may assist students to notice where a punctuation mark is placed, such as in the following situations:

1. when there are words in a series as in, "At the picnic, they ate ham, sandwiches, lettuce salad, and bread." If the teacher does not say <u>why</u> commas need to be added, the sentence would lack meaning. Without commas, there could be as many as five items at the picnic or as few as three, depending upon where the commas are placed.
2. when there are complete thoughts which need to be separated with the use of a period as in --- "The picnic was enjoyed by all. Each person was very hungry." If a period was

not placed at the end of each sentence, the words would read --- "The picnic was enjoyed by all each person was very hungry." "The picnic was enjoyed by all each person ----" initially, sounds different in meaning as compared to the two sentences being separated properly by a period.

3. when there are different types of sentences such as an interrogative sentence whereby a question mark needs to be placed at the end of the sentence as compared to a different end punctuation mark. As talk is recorded, the teacher may state why the question mark is necessary (See Ediger, 2001, 120 -123).

In the above examples of recorded sentences, the teacher calls student attention to where and why the punctuation marks are needed. Learning about punctuation marks is done in context, not in isolated tasks such as in drill and memorization of punctuation mark usage. Students are learning punctuation within the framework of ideas they presented and with meaning theory being in evidence. Learning of proper punctuation is then useful and has utilitarian values. Proper punctuation is applied in a functional situation, not in isolation from practice.

Writing for a Variety of Purposes

Written work for early primary grade students may well emphasize the personalized approach such as in using reading and writing connections. Ideas written then come from the learner, not from external sources. The following sequential purposes in writing may then be stressed within a functional situation:

1. business and friendly letters. Here, for example, the learner needs to perceive reasons for separating the day of the month from the calendar year with a comma --- September 6, 2002, otherwise it would read September 62002.
2. poetry, rhymed and unrhymed. In adding imagery, the student needs to use commas at appropriate places, e. g. The clouds, looking like pillows in the floating sky, appear to be made for sleeping. There is clarification here of a creative comparison being made when using a comma such as clouds = looking like floating pillows in the sky.
3. prose with its elements of characterization, setting, plot, irony, theme, and underlying messages. In describing a character, there may be words in a series which need separation with comma use such as, "Anthony was reckless, a careless spender of money, haughty, lacked imagination, and impulsive."

If the commas were omitted, the student may perceive a lack of idea organization and clarity.

3. invitations answering the questions of why, what, when, and where. Each of these questions need answers, separated by periods in order that run on sentences are not in the offing.

4. announcements containing essential information.

5. formal dramatization parts whereby the inherent content comes from the basal text or from a library book. Each character's speaking part needs to be set of with quotation marks, otherwise it is difficult to separate what a character says from the rest of the background content needed in writing play parts.

6. a written report on a library book read or on a selected topic in science or social studies.

7. outlines, summaries, and/or conclusions drawn.

8. diary and log entries.

9. editorials and commentaries.

10. evaluations developed to appraise the self in personal achievement. Each evaluation statement needs to be clearly written with proper punctuation used inside individual statements and at the end of the assessment item (See Ediger, 1996, 17-18).

Students may perceive a need for using proper punctuation by looking at non-examples, as in the following:

Roger a carpenter liked to work in the outdoors his hard work brought him success in many cases he became very hungry by lunchtime and liked french fries hamburgers cheese piazza and a soft drink.

The above writing may be punctuated by students and reasons given for each punctuation mark used. The corrected writing then includes the following revision:

Roger, a carpenter, liked to work in the outdoors. His hard work brought him success in many cases. He became very hungry at lunch time and liked french fries, hamburgers, cheese piazza, and a soft drink (Ediger, 1997, 29-30).

The reading/writing connection is important for meaningful learning to occur. What is and has been written can be read. What has been read may be summarized in writing. The student needs to perceive that knowledge is related and the language arts areas can be integrated into all curriculum areas.

In context and sequentially, the student should become increasingly knowledgeable and skillful in the proper use of punctuation. The following are selected basics which students need to learn and use in order that clarity in reading and writing is in evidence:

1. separating words in a series with commas, as in "For dinner, they had chicken, turkey dressing, jello salad, and peas." If the commas were omitted, it would be difficult to say how many different food items were in evidence at the dinner.
2. using proper end punctuation marks in sentences as in
   a) using a period to end a sentence which states a fact or opinion.
   b) using a question mark to indicate that an interrogative sentence is in evidence.
   c) using an exclamation mark to show strong feelings.
   d) using a period to end an imperative sentence indicating a command or request.
3. using commas to separate an appositive/appositive phrase from the rest of the sentence, e. g. Bob, a brick layer, is sick today.
4. using a comma to set apart an introductory dependent clause from an ensuing independent clause: After the game was over, Bill felt tired. There is a pause then after the dependent clause; other wise the two clauses would run together in a somewhat meaningless fashion.
5. using a comma after a direct address, "Alicia, my cousin is here." Compare that sentence with "Alicia, my cousin, is here." The two sentences are quite different in meaning depending upon where the comma is placed.
6. using quotation marks to set apart a direct quote from the rest of the sentence, "Oscar ran a good race, but lost," said Emmett. Notice the comma after the direct quote.
7. separating individual words which show strong feeling as in the following: Don't! Stop! Contrast the previous two words with the following in meaning: Don't stop! Or, "Run!" she cried," with "Run?" she cried (See Ediger, 1996, 34-35).

Ideas in writing come first, in importance, from the student. What has been written may then be proof read and punctuation marks added as needed. The mechanics of writing should not be emphasized first, followed by ideas developed by the student. The written content needs to be there in order that students might correctly punctuate the product. Nor, should punctuation

be stressed during the time ideas are written because the student may not concentrate on the major purpose of writing and that is to convey information to others.

Criteria to use in Teaching and Learning

There are definite criteria from the psychology of learning which should be used in teaching punctuation to students. First, there needs to be a purpose for having students learn proper punctuation. That overall goal is to write clearly and distinctly. Otherwise the reader will be uncertain as to intended meanings in the written script. If a student's purpose is to write about a birthday party and states that, "John Mark Edward Lee and Kent Dean were at the party," how many were there in total? There could be as many as five and as few as three, depending upon where the commas are placed to separate names of persons attending. Purpose for learning is vital. The teacher may state clearly, prior to writing, what the purpose is for the ongoing lesson and that may be to separate words in a series. Examples and nonexamples may be written on the chalkboard or in the computer to indicate what happens to meanings when incorrect punctuation is used ss well as when correct punctuation is used.

Second, interest in learning is important. Attentive students will learn more as compared to those lacking interest. Thus, the teacher needs to implement teaching strategies whereby students become engaged in learning abut punctuation in the reading/writing connection. A variety of learning opportunities is important here. Variety needs to be in the offing to encourage active learner participation as well as meet personal needs. Active participants achieve at a higher rate as compared to passive recipients. Identifying and solving problems pertaining to punctuating sentences correctly needs to be stressed. All students need to become interested in teaching and learning situations. The teacher then needs to attend to the diverse styles of learning in the classroom (See Searson and Dunn, 2001).

Third, students should have chances to reveal learnings in diverse ways. Students individually may then may reveal if, for example, they desire to indicate knowledge about punctuation learnings individually or collaboratively. Each person has strengths and weaknesses in learning; some will like to work by the self whereas others will wish to work in a committee or group setting to indicate what has been learned in punctuation (See Gardner, 1993).

Fourth, motivated students learn more than do the unmotivated. There are different methods which may be used to motivate students. One way is to give honest praise to individual students for quality achievement in punctuation. A second way is to provide extrinsic rewards for doing well. The teacher should observe that students do not become hooked on these extrinsic rewards, but they are used as a means to an end and that end being to achieve more optimally. Intrinsic motivation is the best approach to use for motivation in that a student learns because he/she wishes to do so. Success in learning is another motivator in that the leaning opportunities provided students are sequenced appropriately so that continual progress on the part of each learner is emphasized. Each previous learning acquired is then related directly to the next step in achievement and progress.

Fifth, meaning theory is salient to emphasize in teaching punctuation. Punctuation must make sense to students. It is not taught for the sake of doing so, but rather to assist learners individually to communicate effectively in writing. What is taught must be understood by the student so that meaningful learnings accrue. Hardly can students learn about interrogative sentences unless the background information is there so that the end punctuation mark can be placed correctly. The question mark then indicates that a question has been raised when communicating with others.

Sixth, individual differences need to be provided for. Students individually are at different places in punctuation achievement. Selected students will need more time, for example, in learning about dependent clauses as compared to others. Some will need more concrete experiences in learning about punctuation as compared to others. Then too, there will be students who are quite advanced in punctuation knowledge and skills and may achieve more from the abstract, even initially, in the instructional sequence.

Seventh, selected students are more aggressive in a positive manner in pursuing tasks as compared to those who are more passive in their responses. Each student needs assistance in pursuing learning opportunities which aid in attaining optimal achievement in punctuation. Learners need to develop quality habits of learning which affect how well they will be achieving. Time on task is important!

Eighth, each student needs to persevere on an assignment or voluntary activity until its completion. Giving up does not help in learning. When needed, students need assistance from the teacher or peers to persevere and complete punctuation tasks

at hand. Staying with it is a good trait for students to achieve.

Ninth, a caring learning environment needs to be in the offing. Students who feel and believe that others care for them should become increasingly proficient in achievement. With the caring attitude of students for each other, no learner should fall through the cracks. In this kind of a learning environment, students refrain from disrupting the classroom and rather help the teacher to provide assistance and guidance to each learner, as needed. Peers also are involved in helping, assisting, and working harmoniously with others.

Tenth, quality sequence for each student in learning needs to be in the offing. Seamless learning for each student is then an ideal to accomplish. This could involve either the teacher providing ordered learnings for students when assignment are made, or learners may sequence their very own experiences, such as in voluntarily completing a task (Ediger, 2000, Chapter Ten).

Correct punctuation needs to be in evidence in order that quality communication is in the offing. Misunderstandings occur in written work when punctuation marks are not placed properly in context. What is written can be read and thus emphasizes the reading/writing connection.

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